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Sexual Consent Scale, Revised

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The purpose of the Sexual Consent Scale, Revised (SCS-R; Humphreys, 2004; Humphreys & Brousseau, 2009; Humphreys & Herold, 2007) is to assess attitudes and behaviors about the negotiation of sexual consent between sexual partners. This scale was normed on heterosexual undergraduate students at three universities.

Description
The SCS was initially developed using semistructured focus group interviews with university students to gain an initial understanding of the key themes regarding sexual consent negotiations. These themes were then translated into Likert-type items for the quantitative survey. Use of focus...
groups prior to developing the survey instrument improved the phrasing and relevance of the items, as well as ensuring adequate coverage of the topic area. The original SCS (Humphreys & Herold, 2007) is a 35-item scale containing both attitude and behavior items, each with two subscales: Asking for consent first is important, Commitment reduces asking for consent, Consent discussions/awareness, and Consent is negotiated once, respectively.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1985, 2001, 2005) was used to redesign the original sexual consent scale to maximize its use as a predictive tool. Additional items were added to the SCS to ensure adequate coverage of the three predictors of behavioral intent in the TPB (i.e., attitude toward the action, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control).

The SCS-R is a 40-item, self-report questionnaire that is answered using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Factor analysis with varimax rotation revealed four attitudinal subscales and two behavioral subscales. The four attitudinal subscales are Positive Attitude Towards Establishing Consent (9 items, \( M = 4.67 \)), Lack of Perceived Behavioral Control (9 items, \( M = 3.18 \)), Relationship Length Norms (5 items, \( M = 5.02 \)), and (Pro) Assuming Consent (7 items, \( M = 3.08 \)). The two behavioral subscales are Indirect Consent Behaviors (6 items, \( M = 4.97 \)) and Awareness of Consent (4 items, \( M = 3.55 \)). The final 40-item factor structure accounted for 48.7% of the variance (Humphreys & Brousseau, 2009).

Response Mode and Timing

Two alternate modes are possible. As a paper-and-pencil survey, respondents circle a number from 1 to 7 corresponding to their degree of agreement or disagreement with each item. As an online survey (using an internal or external service), respondents click on the bullet response from 1 to 7 corresponding to their degree of agreement or disagreement with each item. The SCS-R requires approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Scoring

Items are scored 1 for Strongly Disagree to 7 for Strongly Agree, with the exception of the reversed items. Items 17, 34, 40 are reverse scored. To obtain subscale scores, add together the score on each item and divide by the number of items for each subscale.

Reliability

Based on a dataset of 396 completed surveys, the reliability for the whole SCS-R was .89. Internal consistency for each subscale, using coefficient alpha, was as follows: Positive Attitude Towards Establishing Consent (\( \alpha = .83 \)), Lack of Perceived Behavioral Control (\( \alpha = .85 \)), Relationship Length Norms (\( \alpha = .72 \)), (Pro) Assuming Consent (\( \alpha = .68 \)), Indirect Consent Behaviors (\( \alpha = .78 \)), and Awareness of Consent (\( \alpha = .72 \); Humphreys & Brousseau, 2009).

Test-retest reliability was conducted on a sample of 45 students over a 5-week interval. Coefficients for the 6 subscales ranged from .63 to .71 (Humphreys & Brousseau, 2009).

Validity

Construct validity was examined by comparing the six subscales of the SCS-R to two previously established scales, the Sexual Sensation Seeking Scale (SSSS; Kalichman & Rompa, 1995) and Hurlbert’s Index of Sexual Assertiveness (HISA; Hurlbert, 1991). The SSSS assesses the willingness to take physical and social risks to achieve varied and novel sexual sensations and experiences. Given that establishing sexual consent is a “safe” behavior that guards against miscommunication and, possibly, coercion, there should be a logical connection between the two measures: As the trait of sensation seeking increases, the formal negotiation of sexual consent between sexual partners should decrease. Sensation seeking was negatively correlated with positive attitude towards establishing consent (\( r = -.15, p < .05 \)) and positively correlated with assuming consent (\( r = .15, p < .05 \)), believing that longer relationships reduce the need for establishing consent (relationship length norms; \( r = .15, p < .05 \)) and using more indirect consent behaviors (\( r = .18, p < .05 \); Humphreys & Brousseau, 2009).

Likewise, sexual assertiveness would be logically connected to sexual consent because both concepts are characterized by a willingness to communicate about sex. Assertive communication about sexuality includes aspects of consenting to sexual activity, such as initiating, talking about contraceptives, past partners, desires and general comfort (Morokoff et al., 1997). Sexual assertiveness was negatively correlated with a lack of perceived behavioral control (\( r = -.35, p < .01 \)) and positively correlated with awareness of consent issues (\( r = .24, p < .01 \)) and using more indirect consent behaviors (\( r = .23, p < .01 \); Humphreys & Brousseau, 2009).

Extending the Theory of Planned Behavior to sexual consent, the intent to negotiate sexual consent should be based on attitudes in favor of establishing consent first and attitudes in favor of assuming consent, a perceived lack of behavioral control, relationship length norms, and past sexual behavior. Predictive validity was assessed by conducting a standard regression analysis using intent to verbally negotiate for sexual consent in the next five sexual encounters (2 items) with the 6 subscales of the SCS-R. Being male (\( B = -.36, \beta = -.15 \)), perceiving greater behavioral control over negotiating consent (\( B = -.22, \beta = -.22 \)), having positive attitudes towards establishing consent before sexual activity begins (\( B = .20, \beta = -.17 \)), using fewer indirect approaches to negotiate consent in the past (\( B = -.41, \beta = -.39 \)), and having more awareness and discussions of consent (\( B = .07, \beta = .08 \)) were all statistically unique predictors of the intent to verbally negotiate sexual consent in the near future, \( F(6,380) = 33.31, p < .001, R^2 = .39 \) (Humphreys & Brousseau, 2009).
Other Information

Permission to use the SCS or the SCS-R may be obtained from T. Humphreys. I acknowledge the assistance of Ed Herold, University of Guelph and Melanie Brousseau, UQAM in the development of this scale.

References


In M. Cowling & P. Reynolds (Eds.), Making sense of sexual consent (pp. 209–225). Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.


Exhibit

Sexual Consent Scale, Revised

Instructions: Please note that the term sexual consent is used extensively throughout this questionnaire. Please use the definition of sexual consent below when answering the questions that follow.

Sexual consent: the freely given verbal or nonverbal communication of a feeling of willingness to engage in sexual activity.

Using the following freely given verbal or nonverbal communication of a feeling of willingness to engage in sexual activity. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers, just your opinions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factor 1: Positive Attitude Towards Establishing Consent

1. I feel that sexual consent should always be obtained before the start of any sexual activity.
2. I think it is equally important to obtain sexual consent in all relationships regardless of whether or not they have had sex before.
3. I believe that asking for sexual consent is in my best interest because it reduces any misinterpretations that might arise.
4. I feel that verbally asking for sexual consent should occur before proceeding with any sexual activity.
5. When initiating sexual activity, I believe that one should always assume they do not have sexual consent.
6. I believe that it is just as necessary to obtain consent for genital fondling as it is for sexual intercourse.
7. I think that consent should be asked before any kind of sexual behavior, including kissing or petting.
8. I feel it is the responsibility of both partners to make sure sexual consent is established before sexual activity begins.
9. Before making sexual advances, I think that one should assume ‘no’ until there is clear indication to proceed.

Factor 2: (Lack of) Perceived Behavioral Control

10. I would have difficulty asking for consent because it would spoil the mood.
11. I am worried that my partner might think I’m weird or strange if I asked for sexual consent before starting any sexual activity.
12. I think that verbally asking for sexual consent is awkward.
13. I would worry that, if other people knew I asked for sexual consent before starting sexual activity, they would think I was weird or strange.
14. I would have difficulty asking for consent because it doesn’t really fit with how I like to engage in sexual activity.
15. I believe that verbally asking for sexual consent reduces the pleasure of the encounter.
16. I would have a hard time verbalizing my consent in a sexual encounter because I am too shy.
17. I feel confident that I could ask for consent from a new sexual partner [R].
18. I would not want to ask a partner for consent because it would remind me that I’m sexually active.
Factor 3: Relationship Length Norms

19. I believe that the need for asking for sexual consent decreases as the length of an intimate relationship increases.
20. I think that obtaining sexual consent is more necessary in a casual sexual encounter than in a committed relationship.
21. I think that obtaining sexual consent is more necessary in a new relationship than in a committed relationship.
22. If a couple has a long history of consenting sexual activity with each other, I do not believe that they need to ask for consent during each sexual encounter.
23. I believe that partners are less likely to ask for sexual consent the longer they are in a relationship.

Factor 4: (Pro) Assuming Consent

24. I think it is okay to assume consent and proceed sexually until the partner indicates “no.”
25. If a sexual request is made and the partner indicates “no,” I feel that it is okay to continue negotiating the request.
26. I think nonverbal behaviors are as effective as verbal communication to indicate sexual consent.
27. Not asking for sexual consent is not really a big deal.
28. In making a sexual advance, I believe that it is okay to assume consent unless you hear a “no.”
29. I believe it is enough to ask for consent at the beginning of a sexual encounter.
30. I believe that sexual intercourse is the only sexual activity that requires explicit verbal consent.

Factor 5: Indirect Behavioral Approach

31. Typically I communicate sexual consent to my partner using nonverbal signals and body language.
32. Typically I ask for consent by making a sexual advance and waiting for a reaction, so I know whether or not to continue.
33. It is easy to accurately read my current (or most recent) partner’s non-verbal signals as indicating consent or non-consent to sexual activity.
34. I always verbally ask for consent before I initiate a sexual encounter [R].
35. I don’t have to ask or give my partner sexual consent because my partner knows me well enough.
36. I don’t have to ask or give my partner sexual consent because I have a lot of trust in my partner to “do the right thing.”

Factor 6: Awareness of Consent

37. I have discussed sexual consent issues with a friend.
38. I have heard sexual consent issues being discussed by other students on campus.
39. I have discussed sexual consent issues with my current (or most recent) partner at times other than during sexual encounters.
40. I have not given much thought to the topic of sexual consent [R].

Note. The scale follows each of the statements.

Reasons for Consenting to Unwanted Sex Scale

TERRY P. HUMPHREYS & DEBORAH J. KENNETT, Trent University

The purpose of the Reasons for Consenting to Unwanted Sex Scale (RCUSS; Humphreys & Kennett, 2008; Kennett, Humphreys, & Patchell, 2009) is to assess the amount of endorsement women give to a variety of reasons for why they have voluntarily consented to engage in sexual activity they did not desire. This scale was normed on heterosexual undergraduate females.

Description

The RCUSS was developed on the basis of past research that suggested women voluntarily give in to sexual activity, even though they may have little or no sexual desire or would rather not engage in sexual activity (Meston & Buss, 2007; O’Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). For example, Zimmerman, Sprecher, Langer, and Holloway (1995) found that, when asked how sure they were that they could say “no” if a boyfriend was trying to talk them into having sex, only 61% of females reported that they could definitely say no to unwanted sex. In a diary study, O’Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) found that 50% of the undergraduate women sampled wrote that they had consented to unwanted sexual activity, ranging from kissing to sexual intercourse, during a 2-week period.

The items of the RCUSS were chosen on the basis of past literature, suggesting that women consent to unwanted